Oklahoma Chess Monthly

FEBRUARY 2017

Chess News and Chess History for Oklahoma

Howard Zhong

In This Issue:

- Lou Hays Remembers Spassky
- Cope on Waiting for a Blunder
- Ciaran Annotates
- Plus News Bites, Game of the Month, Puzzles, Top 25 List, Tournament Reports, and more.

This month's issue is packed with so much chess news I had to delay some items until next issue! Thanks to everyone who has been contributing! We start with the next installment of Lou Hays' series on grandmasters he has known — Spassky. We have the first of a new series by John Cope, and Ciaran O'Hare shows the depth possible in ICCF correspondence play in some remarkable new annotations. We have news stories about Howard Zhong and Alex Relyea, plus other news, tourney reports, and more. Enjoy. — TB

Grandmasters I Have Known: Spassky

by Lou Hays

[Note: Special appreciation to Kay Hale for the use of excerpts from his 1986 article on the Spassky visit to Dallas, link below.]

In the early summer of 1986 I received a call from my friend Hal Bogner, a chess organizer from California. Hal told me of a chess tour of the U.S. planned by former World Champion Boris Spassky. Hal explained that we could arrange a simultaneous exhibition in Dallas for

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$50 per board ($110 in 2017 dollars!) for up to fifty boards. Local sponsors would have to cover a portion of Spassky's travel expenses ($200) and provide housing. Boris Spassky? This was an offer I couldn't refuse.

The circumstances couldn't have been better for me. Spassky would fly to Dallas from Los Angeles on Tuesday, September 2, the day after Labor Day, the very same day a friend and I would be returning from a chess tournament in San Diego. We booked ourselves on the same flight as Spassky.

NM Mike Richards, my friend, of course had a long endgame in his last round in San Diego. By the time he finished and we packed up to go to LA, it was already late evening. We managed three hours of sleep and stumbled to the L.A. airport by 6:00 am to catch the 7:00 am flight. We introduced ourselves to a haggard and tired looking Spassky at the gate before boarding.

Once we arrived at my home in Dallas, Spassky was delighted to learn there were tennis courts a couple of blocks away and that my wife, Susan, was a class A tennis player. Boris was trim and in great shape for a forty-nine year old. Susan played him several times and told me afterwards, "Boris is very good at tennis, too."

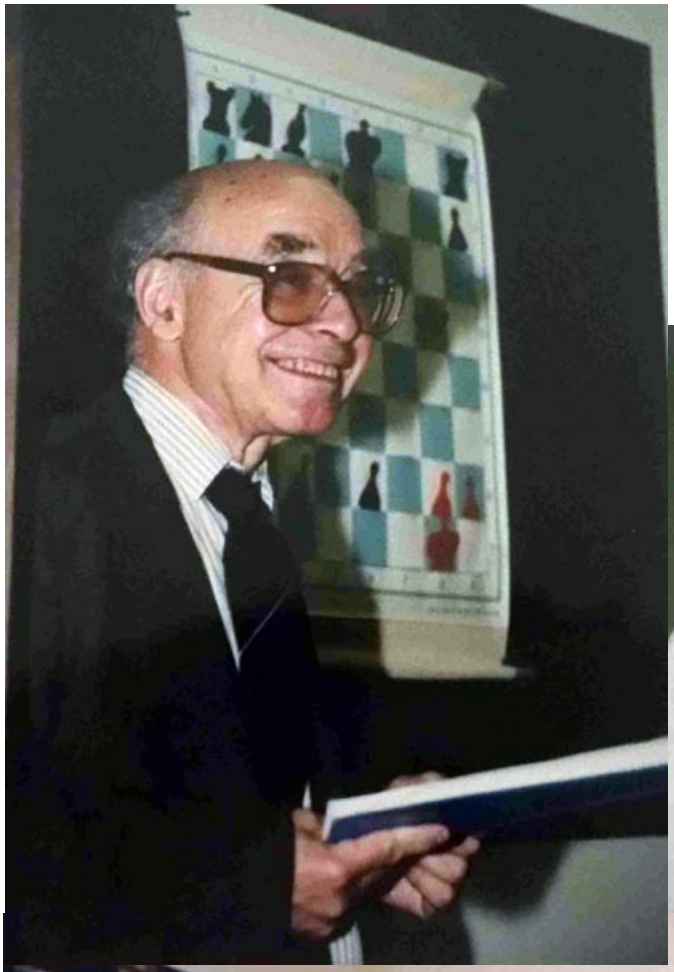
"Spassky was a debonair, worldly, and kind gentleman, without a hint of self-importance or arrogance. He was peaceful and relaxed, and seemed only to want to enjoy each day…"

The entire Dallas chess community had been abuzz about the Spassky visit for weeks prior to his arrival. Although it had been 14 years since the Fischer–Spassky match in 1972, Boris Spassky was still a household name in the U.S. I had no trouble filling the fifty slots for the simul, and I had several more on a waiting list.

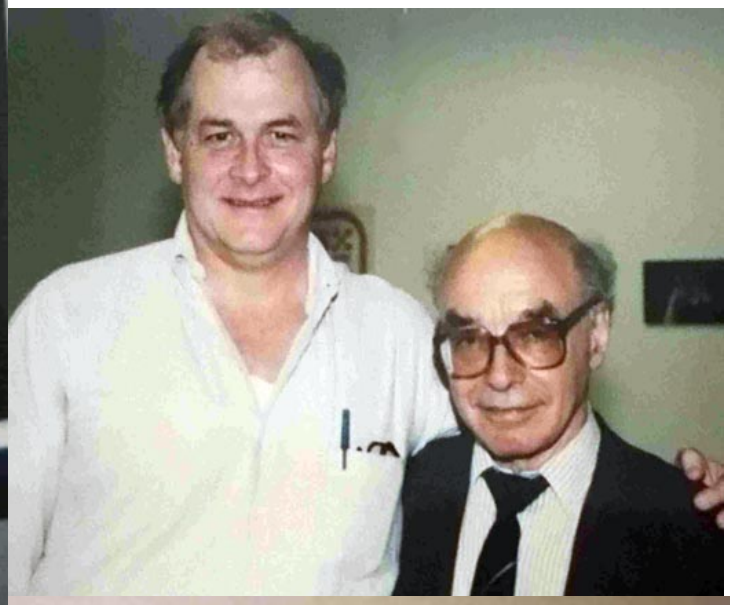
Spassky was a debonair, worldly, and kind gentleman, without a hint of self-importance or arrogance. He was peaceful and relaxed, and seemed only to want to enjoy each day, moment by moment, with no stress. At a reception I hosted for Boris, he calmly answered all the Bobby Fischer questions everybody could throw at him. Boris later told me that he had been getting these same questions nonstop since the 1972 match. Later when I ran into Boris at the 1990 Kasparov-Karpov World Championship match in Lyons, France, he chuckled and told me he was STILL answering the same old Bobby Fischer questions every day. Boris and Fischer remained friends after the 1972 match. The fact that Bobby chose Spassky as his 1992 rematch opponent was no accident.

Spassky (left) at Lou Hays' home in 1986, here playing FM John Jacobs, with Zola Levitt kibitzing. Photo courtesy of Kay Hale.

When the night of the big simul came, I set up a table in the Marriott ballroom to verify the sign up list and collect $50 from each player. All fifty players showed up, so Spassky kindly said he



Pictures from the Dallas Chess Club:
After last month's article on David Bronstein, Lou Hays' friend Kay Hale sent these images from the Dallas in the 1990s. Clockwise from left: Bronstein lecturing at the club in 1993, Lou Hays with Bronstein 1993, Lou Hays as club president, 1990s; Grandmaster Yasser Seirawan lecturing at the club, 1995.



would play everybody on the waiting list the following night, which he did at the Dallas Chess Club. After all players had checked in and paid, I went outside and hid the $2,500 in a "secret" compartment beneath the console in my car.

Kay Hale, a Dallas chess player who was at the simul that night wrote in his excellent article about the exhibition in 1986, recently printed in *Texas Knights*, Vol. 58, No.3 — https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B5FHoiUzDb1EaVc3LVREb1lNaFk/view

"Spassky gave an autobiographical sketch of himself prior to his simultaneous play. He began by talking about his abilities as a player. He said quite matter-of-factly that, when he was young, it was almost unbelievable how strong he was. He said that even today when he plays over some of his earlier games he is extremely impressed with the quality of them.

In Spassky's words, "My train has gone," meaning that he felt that his best days as a chess player were behind him. The reader needs to realize that Spassky tends to be rather self-critical. Before dismissing him to the scrap heap of old pawn pushers, it is worthwhile to note that (then) *World Chess Champion Gary Kasparov had never beaten Spassky up until 1986, and had, in fact, lost two games to Spassky! A young man from Brooklyn once had a similar problem!*

Spassky lecturing at the Dallas Chess Club, 1986 (Photo courtesy of Kay Hale,)

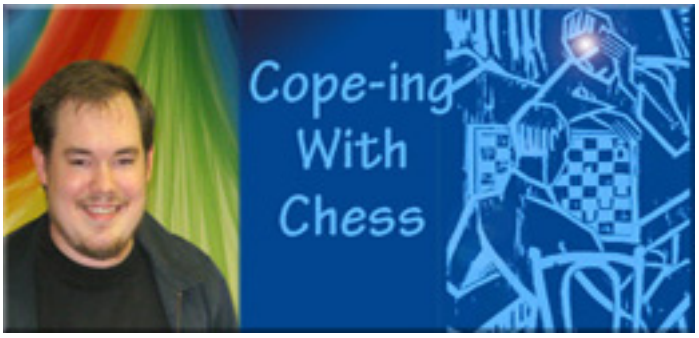
In talking about the influence his trainers had on him, he began by talking about his work with Zak, who was his earliest trainer. Commenting on his association with Tolush, he said that he learned how to handle the initiative from Tolush. It was during that period one starts seeing the King's Gambit and Hennig-Schara Gambit appear in his games. Prior to his association with Tolush, he played "like an old man," meaning that he played solidly and positionally, but not at all sharply. From Bonderevsky, he learned to play "until only the Kings were left." (At one point in Spassky's career, he tended to offer numerous draws.)

Many have commented on Spassky's being one of the most psychologically minded of chess players. Certainly his introspective nature was revealed as he talked about his reign as World Champion. He said quite frankly that the time he was World Champion was the unhappiest period in his life. He said that he felt that the reason this was such a difficult time for him was because he felt a great responsibility to the chess world. He believed that it was necessary for him to play frequently and consistently at a very high level. In part, one has the impression that his "insisting" on playing Fischer, despite his challenger's antics, was motivated by his very strong sense of social responsibility to chess players everywhere…

… The question was directed to Spassky about what he would have written in a chapter in the book How to Open a Chess Game [a popular opening book in that era]. *Spassky's eyes became quite animated at this question, and he replied, "The King's Gambit!" He very warmly talked about his extreme fondness for this opening and that he had played "thousands of King's Gambits," primarily in simultaneous exhibitions. Not only did he leave the impression that this was an effective weapon in simultaneous exhibitions, but that was an opening near and dear to his heart. Interestingly enough, in his simultaneous display in Dallas, he responded with the King's Gambit on all boards when his opponent responded to his 1.e4 with 1…e5."*

Despite Spassky's supposed dull style early on, he played many sparkling and brilliant games:

Continued on page 22



Waiting for a Blunder

by John Cope

What is perhaps the worst bad habit that intermediate players have, one so natural and insidious that it often holds back players from improving their results?

I call it "waiting for a blunder." As a sports aficionado, I very much enjoy sports analogies; so let me enlist one to explain.

When a football quarterback drops back to pass, he is hoping to find an open receiver. If one of the defending backs falls down, leaving a receiver wide open, it is easy to throw him the ball for a big gain or touchdown. In amateur or high school football this happens all the time, and seemingly all a good quarterback has to do is "wait for a defender to stumble" and hit the open man. But of course as that quarterback graduates to college or pro football, the defenders get better and better. Simply waiting for the defenders to blow their coverage no longer works, because it seldom happens, so a quarterback who keeps indulging in that strategy will find himself getting sacked a lot and ending up face down in the mud under 900 pounds of smelly defensive linemen.

A similar thing happens to novice chess players as they improve at chess. I saw it in my own games when I was a young player, and I see it in the games of my students. As a youngster gains skill with tactics, he or she can win a lot of games simply by taking advantage of tactical stumbles by the opponent. Coaches teach tactics first for that reason. Winning against other novice players with tactics alone thus tends to lead to an artificial *reliance* upon tactics — like the quarterback who waits for the defender to stumble, we wait for the opponent to blunder. But "waiting for a blunder" is not a strategy, and a reliance upon it is a bad habit that ceases to work as you graduate to playing tougher opponents.

In this month's article, first we'll look at a typical example in which a tactically proficient player simply makes "natural" moves or "trappy" moves while hopefully waiting for that blunder. It will show why it is tempting, and why it is problematic. Lastly we will look at an example of a better way toward improvement — developing our ability to make purposeful moves that assertively stick with a plan. There's an old chess saying that "a bad plan is better than no plan at all," and there's some truth to that. Even pursuing a second-rate plan gives our moves purpose during the game. It's much easier to keep up a strong standard of play when playing purposefully.

Just being able to get through a game without dropping pieces is worth hundreds of rating points to novice players; most of my students have reached ratings of 1000+ after having learned basic tactics. To use another football analogy, a quarterback must first learn how to throw the ball accurately before it makes sense for him to try to learn the intricacies of reading a defense. But sooner or later that quarterback will have to learn that and all the other elements of his craft in order to go beyond the high school level. Similarly, tactics will get you as high as the 1500+ level or so in chess, but if you continue to rely on them, your rating will start to plateau. You will need to shed this bad habit and become more adept at planning to proceed further.

In our first example, Black is a very capable young player who has since reached A-class and is capable of beating experts. But here,

For FEBRUARY 2017

Top 25 Active Oklahoma Players				
	Player	This Month	Change +/-	
1	Advait Patel	2453	0	
2	Daniel Ng	2277	-14	
3	Howard Zhong	2238	0	
4	Mark Hulsey	2221	-4	
5	Tom Braunlich	2201	0	
6	Tom Amburn	2200	0	
7	Chibuzo C Ilonze	2179	0	
8	Sergey Galant	2178	0	
9	David Zelnick	2150	-11	▲
10	Joshua Alexander	2142	-31	▼
11	Anthony Paolercio	2130	0	
12	Jamal I. El Chamieh	2124	0	
13	John Cope	2089	0	
14	Ryan Farell	2089	-17	▼
15	Chuck Johnson	2087	0	
16	Michael Nugent	2087	7	
17	Tom Patton	2080	6	
18	James Tyner	2074	11	▲
19	Joe Dean Veal	2073	0	
20	David Luscomb	2068	0	
21	Charles D Unruh	2062	38	▲
22	Matt Dalthorp	2062	0	
23	Veronika Zilajeva	2059	0	
24	Alan Islas	2024	18	
25	James Long	2024	23	▲

Player of the Month

ALEX RELYEA

Former Okie Alex Relyea was honored with the 2016 Organizer of the Year Award by USChess. See the article, page 9.

against a lower-rated adult player, he handicaps himself by wandering back and forth between several different provocative waiting ideas, seemingly trying to entice the opponent into a tactical scuffle. But his opponent doesn't cooperate — White calmly goes about his business, avoiding any major tactical errors and following a simple plan. By the end, White's purposeful moves carry the day.

Duke, Brian (1570) –
Jiang, Bryan (1670)
5th OCF Hanken FIDE Open (2.16.2014)

1.Nf3 Nf6 2.d4 g6 3.c4 Bg7 4.Nc3 d6 5.e4 0-0 6.Be3 Nbd7 7.Qd2 Re8(?!) 8.Be2 Ng4 9.Bg5 c5

White continues to sensibly develop, but Black's moves have been odd given the normal plans in such positions. Here he seeks to start a fracas in the center. White can take advantage of this with 10. h3. But instead White just closes the center, as he has a plan in mind.

10.d5 a6 11. h3 Nge5 12. 0-0 f6?

Provocative. Black's knight sortie has only culminated with the piece on an insecure post. Black is playing 2-3 move ideas that don't really go together while apparently hoping for some sort of tactical melee to be initiated by the opponent. He's like the quarterback waiting in the pocket for one of the defenders to fall down so a receiver can break wide open. But his unwillingness to throw into tighter lanes, so to speak, is causing the defensive line to get a little too close for comfort.

13.Bh4 Nf7 14.a3!

White has developed his pieces, sidestepped thematically bad trades, and identified a plan: queenside expansion. While playing on the kingside might be even stronger after Black's self-inflicted weaknesses on that wing, White focuses on the plan he is more confident in and follows it up sensibly.

14...Bh6 15.Qc2 Kh8?

Instead of justifying his previous move by

PUZZLES

Answers Next Page

White to move and win. (Easy)

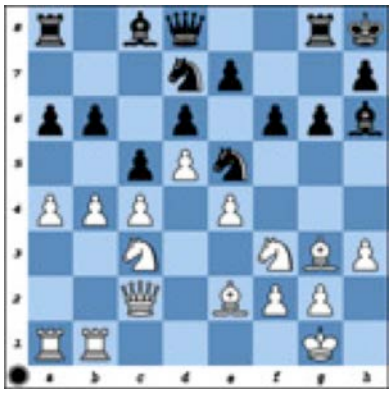
Black to move and win. (Difficult)

improving the bishop again with 15 … Bf4!, Black marks time. While one or two of the above moves seemed similar—waiting moves whose real purpose was to delay for the opponent to make a mistake—at least most of them connected to some sort of short-term plan. This, on the other hand, is pretty much just more waiting. Perhaps the most discouraging part of playing in this way, though, is that the opponent only has to play sensibly to make the waiting itself a self-destructive plan.

16.b4 b6 17.Rfb1 Rg8

This is either another waiting move or, more likely, played with the idea of pushing the g-pawn at some point. But this seems like a vastly inferior version of Black's normal plans to expand on the kingside in the late opening in the KID. It's much later, not as well supported, further away from the center, and less effective even if it succeeds. Not a good cocktail.

18.Bg3! Nfe5 19.a4



19… Bg7?

Black continues to change plans every 2-3 moves, making his lack of purpose evident. Some of these mini-plans even seem to run counter to each other. For example, if Black wants to play ...f5 now to try to use the long diagonal, that would work better with the rook on f8 instead of g8. Also, the bishop on g7 doesn't help the idea of ...g5 he hinted at with his previous move, …Rg8. Black's various waiting moves don't fit together.

Meanwhile, White's plan is clear (if unspectacular) and his pieces are coordinated. This type of harmony often leads to wins even when there might have been better options. White might not be throwing touchdowns, but he is driving down

Answers to the Puzzles

(1) This typical attacking position is begging for an attack down the a-file, but how? The solution shows the power of the double check: 1. Ra8+! (just to get the rook out of the way with tempo to bring over the queen) 1. ..Kxa8 2. Qa1+ Kb8 (Now what?) 3. Qa7+!! (Only on this square!) 3…Kxa7 4. Nc6+ (This is the point. It's double-check, and black has to move his king, but the knight is covering the b8 retreat square.) 4. … Ka8 (or 4…Ka6) 5. Ra1+ and mate.

(2) You may have noticed white's weaknesses on g2 and h2, plus Black's latent threat of …Qf1mate if white ever leaves protection of that square. But how to take advantage of all that with so few pieces left? The solution: 1…Rd2! (This indirectly targets h2, as black now threatens 2…Bf3+ and mate on g2 or h2 next move.) 2. Rxd2, Bf3+ 3. Bxf3, Qf1 mate.

the field and gaining five yards every play.

20.a5 bxa5 21.bxa5 Qc7

Black places his queen here because he wants to slow White down on the b-file — pressure on this a5-pawn prevents White from immediately invading with Na4-b6. Still, the queen here doesn't meld with Black's gestures on the kingside, and without her involved it isn't likely any future attack there will succeed.

22.Nxe5!

The start of a simple but effective plan so White can dominate the b-file, particularly the b6 square, and accomplish a strong infiltration into black's position along the file. Again, this isn't objectively the strongest move according to the computer, which prefers 22. Ne1, but White plays this with a clear purpose: He is going to get his bishop to e1 where it protects the a5-pawn, then play Na4 and infiltrate the b-file.

Another football analogy: A team's success isn't determined just by how good its individual players (moves) are. It's also defined by how well they work together as a unit (plans).

22...fxe5 23.f3 Bh6

While White's move was part of a good plan, it did have a drawback: weakening the dark squares on the kingside, particularly e3. Black takes aim at what was left behind.

24.Be1 Nf6?

Black again balks on a sensible plan that would both synergize with his last move and limit his

Continued on page 24

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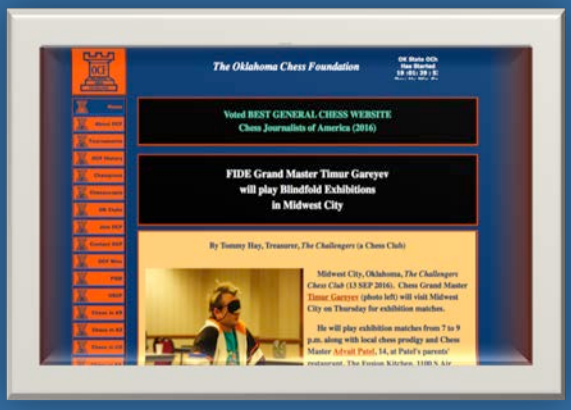
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… and more

Alex Relyea has been honored by USChess with the 2016 Organizer of the Year Award for his outstanding work as a TD and tournament organizer. Alex lived in Oklahoma for six years while at OU and is remembered for his many tournaments there, and the hole in the OKC scene it left when he departed for New Hampshire in 2008. In New England he has even increased his tournament work. For example, his 2016 Events Include

- Portsmouth Open
- Bangor Open
- New Hampshire Closed Championship
- Manchester GM Norm Invitational
- 2016 U.S. Girls Junior Championship Invitational
- 76th New England Open
- Vermont Open
- IM Danny Kopec Memorial
- … and many smaller tournaments.

USChess Executive Board Member Mike Atkins explains the award by saying, "*When this came up in the board meeting, I introduced Alex's name. I knew most of them either knew Alex or knew who he was. I had seen a number of the other board members watching Alex's women's norm tournament online at a recent meeting and providing an underserved population with norm chances was enough by itself to warrant the award. I pointed out other events he had organized and it was a slam dunk.*"

Alex was born and raised in Bangor, Maine, began chess in 1987 (high school) and went to graduate school at OU from 2002 to 2008, which is also when he began organizing and directing under the mentorship of OCF. He has been married 21 years to Nita Patel and they live now in Bedford, NH. See this in-depth interview with him linked here on chessmaine.net.

A solid class A player, Alex also has about 75 ICCF correspondence games going now and a 2250 rating in CC. He also holds many chess offices and sits on several US Chess committees. With this and the tournament organizing he is remarkably busy with chess, and yet he manages it all despite some serious health issues related to diabetes.

Congratulations Alex! It is nice to see such a worthy player/organizer get recognition.

The OU Chess Team participated last month in New Orleans at the Pan American Intercollegiate Team Tournament for the first time in many years and performed remarkably well.

The Chess Club at OU does not enjoy official sport status with the University of Oklahoma, yet, and has achieved all their success so far by their own efforts. The new club President is Matt Dalthorp.

The OU-A team finished tied for 17th despite being much lower rated than that at the start. The team was: Daniel Ng (2.5) (2291), Matt Dalthorp (4.0) (2024), Kyle Twitchell (2.5) (1828), Florian Helff (3.0) (1733).

OU-B finished tied for 43rd place out of the 60 teams, with members Jeremiah Buenger (3.0) (1680), Kenneth Teel (1.5) (1636), Chris Brown (2.0) (1519), Jacob Farber (3.0) (1382)

More next issue.

Zelnick and Long Win in Joplin

The Southwest Missouri Diehards Open, a memorial to a chess club in existence in Joplin for some 50 years, was held January 14th and ended in a four-way tie among Okie experts David Zelnick and James Long, plus Missourians Daniel Todd and Chris Talbot (all with 3). The event was directed by Martin Stahl, and the prize fund sponsored by Gary White of Kansas City, one of the founders of this club. *James Long reports:*

"It was a low turnout (due to ice concerns) but the prize fund was guaranteed, … with $125 awarded to each. Daniel Todd, rated 1697, drew with both Zelnick and me. He was one tough cookie indeed. In the final position from my game, he had a mate in 5 but offered a draw in time pressure that I gladly accepted. I think he had David beat as well, but also offered a draw.

The site was exceptional at the Hilton Garden Inn, and Martin will be hosting another one-day tournament on March 4th at the same place. I would encourage anyone in the Tulsa area to consider attending as it is a really nice place and has great food right around the corner."

"There was a "Diehards" tournament crosstable from 1968 where Tom Amburn (rated 1858 at the time) tied for first. Jim Berry and George Hulburd also were names that I knew from OK. … Some nostalgia from the days of chess past."

We hope to have an article about the history of this Joplin club in a future issue.

Pair Num	Player Name USCF ID / Rtg (Pre->Post)	Total Pts	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4
1 OK	DAVID E ZELNICK 12766727 / R: 2161 ->2150 Q: 1906 ->1902	3.0	W 4 B	D 3 W	D 2 B	W 10 W
2 OK	JAMES LONG 12374730 / R: 2026 ->2024 Q: 1904 ->1900	3.0	W 9 W	W 8 B	D 1 W	D 3 B
3 MO	DANIEL TODD 12842087 / R: 1697 ->1739 Q: 1658 ->1688	3.0	W 10 W	D 1 B	W 7 W	D 2 W
4 MO	CHRISTOPHER L TALBOT 12777197 / R: 1544 ->1620 Q: 1529 ->1580	3.0	L 1 W	W 6 B	W 5 W	W 7 B
5 MO	JASON RILEY YORKE 16093033 / R: Unrated->1405P4 Q: Unrated->1338P4	2.0	L 8 W	W 10 B	L 4 B	W 9 W
6 MO	CHRIS A HUNT 12691877 / R: 1721 ->1696 Q: 1563 ->1548	1.5	D 7 B	L 4 W	W 8 W	U
7 AR	DAVID MORGAN 16058892 / R: 1413P14->1436P18 Q: 1361P14->1380P18	1.5	D 6 W	W 9 B	L 3 B	L 4 W
8 MO	MARTIN DAVID STAHL 12561384 / R: 1557 ->1554 Q: 1462 ->1457	1.0	W 5 B	L 2 W	L 6 B	U
9 MO	ROBERT LLOYD TALBOT 12383820 / R: 1511 ->1500 Q: 1449 ->1400	1.0	L 2 B	L 7 W	W 10 B	L 5 B
10 MO	DAVID W KING 12802854 / R: 785 -> 782 Q: 835 -> 829	0.0	L 3 B	L 5 W	L 9 W	L 1 B

Daniel Todd (left) vs. James Long at the SWMO Diehards Open

3rd Norman Chess Festival

Jan 28-29, 2017 TD: Matt Dalthorp

The Chess Club at OU's third two-day 5-SS chess event in Norman was won by Senior Master Advait Patel ($225), with 5-0 in a field that included 3 masters and two experts. Howard Zhong was 2nd at 4-1. Other prizewinners included Shaun Graham-Bowcaster and Joe Veal.

The Reserve Section (U1700) was won by Alex Bohn ($150) with 4.5. Zile Cao and Francis Irenge tied for 2nd with 3.5, and Oscar Wang was top U1400.

Matt Dalthorp was TD and Kyle Twitchell was assistant TD. Crosstables are online. More coverage next issue.

Below: The top boards in round 2. Pictured in each matchup starting in front is L.Zachare – A.Patel, D. Ng – J. Veal, J. Ellis – H. Zhong, C. Ilonze – S. Case. Photo by Cheng Zhong.

HOWARD ZHONG 2nd Place in 10th GRADE NATIONALS

In December, Norman teenager Howard Zhong won 2nd place in the 10th grade section of the U.S. K-12 National Scholastic tournament in Nashville, TN. He was actually in the lead going into the last round but lost to Alburt Lu (2393) from CA. According to his IM coach, "He had advantage in the middlegame and later around move 40 he was a little worse but could have forced a draw." Still it is an impressive result with more surely to come from Oklahoma's first 'homegrown' NM in 25 years.

Right: Howard receiving the giant trophy from TD Franc Guadalupe.

Below: the opponent takes a very last minute look at Howard's games online while Howard looks on, bemused.

According to Howard's father Cheng Zhong, the trip to Nashville was not finalized until very late due to both the threat of bad weather during the 11-hour drive (which turned out okay), and his school final exams (they had to make special arrangements in the school to skip them). "His teachers were very supportive to accommodate our request," Cheng said.

Support from the Norman chess community also helped. "We would like to thank OU Chess Club for providing Howard with opportunities of practice and tournaments," Cheng said. "In particular, OU freshman, NM Daniel Ng played numerous training games with Howard, which was very instrumental to Howard's good performance in nationals."

Howard Zhong (2219) — Albert Lu (2393)
2016 K-12 National Championship [D35][Rd 7]
1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Be7 4. cxd5 exd5 5. Bf4 Nf6 6. e3 O-O 7. Bd3 c5 8.dxc5 Bxc5 9. Nf3 Nc6 10. O-O d4 11. Na4 Bd6 12. Bxd6 Qxd6 13. Nxd4 Nxd4 14.exd4 Ng4 15. g3 Rd8 16. Be4 Nf6 17. Bg2 Bg4 18. Qd2 Rab8 19. f3 Be6 20. Rfd1Rbc8 21. Nc3 Rc4 22. b3 Rc6 23. Rac1 Qb4 24. Ne2 Qa3 25. Rxc6 bxc6 26. Nc3 Nd5 27. Nxd5 Bxd5 28. f4 g6 29. Bxd5 Rxd5 30. Qc2 Qd6 31. Rc1 Rxd4 32. Qe2 Rd5 33.Re1 Qb4 34. Rd1 Rxd1+ 35. Qxd1 h5 36. h4 Qc3 37. Kf2 Kg7 38. a4 a5 39. Qf3 c2+ 40. Kf1 Kf6 41. Qe3 Kf5 42. Qf3 Qe4 43. Qc3 Kg4 44. Qxa5 Qf3+ 45. Ke1 Qxg3+ 46.Ke2 Qf3+ 47. Ke1 Qe3+ 48. Kd1 Qxb3+ 49. Kc1 Qe3+ 50. Kd1 Qxf4 51. Qg5+ Qxg5 52.hxg5 h4 53. Ke2 Kg3 54. a5 h3 55. a6 h2 56. a7 h1=Q 57. a8=Q Qf3+ 58. Ke1 c5 59. Qb8+ Kg4 60. Qe5 Qg3+ 0-1

26th Annual Holiday Open: Veal and Long Top a Strong Field

The Holiday Open was held December 31 in Stillwater, drawing a strong field including NM Mark Hulsey and several experts. The annual event sponsored by Jim Berry as usual was hard fought and fun, and ended in a tie for first between Joe Dean Veal and James Long atop 29 competitors.

"Twenty-six years ago they told me no one would come to a tournament held between Christmas and New Years," Jim said, followed by gesturing around the room to show the good turnout has proved them wrong over the years.

There were a number of upsets: Ciaran O'Hare – no doubt not used to these fast time controls — was held to a draw by youngster Luke Tran of Kansas, Hulsey was held to a draw by Charles Woodall in round 2, and Jim Berry had a notable upset win against Chuck Johnson, who overstepped in a winning but complicated position.

We welcomed two new USCF members, Omar Abouzahr of Stillwater, and Wenbao Wang, father of Eric Wang (I believe), both of whom played quite well.

The 27th Holiday Open will be in Tulsa. Games in a future issue.

26th HOLIDAY OPEN
Dec. 31, 2016 • Stillwater OK • TD: Jim Berry

#	Name	Rtng	Post	St	Rd 1	Rd 2	Rd 3	Rd 4	Tot
1	Joe Dean Veal	2044	2053	OK	W13	W7	W4	D2	3.5
2	James Long	1989	2006	OK	W26	W11	W3	D1	3.5
3	Jason Wawrzaszek	2053	2054	KS	W12	W14	L2	W6	3.0
4	Logan Zachare	1980	1979	OK	W10	W5	L1	W11	3.0
5	Krish Kumar	1729	1730	OK	W29	L4	W10	W12	3.0
6	Charles Woodall	1918	1931	OK	W16	D8	W9	L3	2.5
7	Zachary Walling	1753	1747	OK	W25	L1	D18	W19	2.5
8	Mark Hulsey	2225	2222	OK	W17	D6	W15	U---	2.5
9	Ciaran O'Hare	2001	1985	OK	D18	W19	L6	W17	2.5
10	Alex T Bohn	1318	1332	OK	L4	W22	L5	W21	2.0
11	Curtis Williams	1682	1676	OK	W20	L2	X25	L4	2.0
12	Naren Pullela	1417	1433	OK	L3	W26	W20	L5	2.0
13	John Williams III	1389	1408	OK	L1	W21	L14	W20	2.0
14	Shaun Graham-bow	1832	1829	OK	W24	L3	W13	U---	2.0
15	Jim Berry	1895	1910	OK	W21	W23	L8	U---	2.0
16	Eric Wang	1241	1243	OK	L6	L20	W29	W26	2.0
17	Danial Smith	1580	1581	OK	L8	D18	W27	L9	1.5
18	Luke M Tran	1356	1435	KS	D9	D17	D7	U---	1.5
19	Jared Ellis	1599	1587	OK	W22	L9	H---	L7	1.5
20	Omar Abouzahr	unr.	1228	OK	L11	W16	L12	L13	1.0
21	Philip Stegall	1230	1210	OK	L15	L13	W22	L10	1.0
22	Wenbao Wang	unr.	900	OK	L19	L10	L21	W29	1.0
23	Chuck Johnson	2115	2103	OK	W27	L15	U---	U---	1.0
24	Aaron M Covington	949	979	OK	L14	H---	D26	U---	1.0
25	Talon D Christian	734	758	OK	L7	W29	F11	U---	1.0
26	Larry Davison	1345	1291	OK	L2	L12	D24	L16	0.5
27	Mike Covington	1499	1484	OK	L23	H---	L17	U---	0.5
28	Thomas Braunlich	2200	2200	OK	H---	U---	U---	U---	0.5
29	Oscar Wang	621	592	OK	L5	L25	L16	L22	0.0

Right: Veal vs Long in the last round, with Krish Kumar and Logan Zachare behind, who tied for 3rd with Jason Wawrzaszek. Below: Charles Woodall (left) vs. Mark Hulsey, with Jim Berry in the background.

TALKING NORMS AND COMPARING NOTES

by Ciaran O'Hare

Note— The last two issues reported Ciaran O'Hare's achievement of a GM Norm in international correspondence chess, and analyzed four of his games. Ciaran here writes to add a LOT more to that story and provide lucid insights to those games. —TB

While it has been difficult to see the first issues of OCM memorializing my good friends Steve and Frank, I wish to congratulate Tom on the quality of the new iteration of the magazine and state my appreciation of his willingness to commit the time and effort it takes. Tom has asked me to contribute a few columns on my involvement in correspondence chess. I hope they find favor with the audience.

I started my correspondence career over 20 years ago playing by postcard. My ambition was to play for the Irish postal team. I found that I liked the challenge of researching openings and keeping up to date with recent games. It was also appealing to try to figure out each position as a puzzle with an optimal solution. The ability to avoid (or so I thought!) blunders was also a relief! Soon, after some success, I committed to try and become an IM. My uncle had played on several Irish Olympiad teams, meeting Fischer, Tal, Spassky, and many others, and it seemed like a comparable success for my side of the family. It took almost 10 years to appreciate and become proficient in this new way of playing chess. I won several tournaments including the Irish Championship and the 2008 USCF Absolute Championship (finished 2010), and am now rated among the top 20 active players in the US. It took 13 years to become an IM, but in doing so I found I was also half way to being a SIM (Senior International Master) and so I had a new goal. As I began to play other dedicated correspondence players the commitment required increased dramatically. This paralleled the dramatically increasing influence of computers in chess.

I have long given up trying to defend modern correspondence chess to OTB players. It is a different game from OTB that happens to use the same rules. We use computers, databases and endgame tablebases, but as everyone uses them the only difference between players is the depth of understanding of the relationships between pawns and pieces, and the willingness to make the required effort. In some ways it is a more honest challenge.

There are two main difficulties that are associated with the computer engine:

1) The brute force logic of the computer has upended many long held tenets of chess (knights can be parked on the rim for 10 moves if they will become useful in the 11th move of a series, h and a pawns can be pushed to extremes), and more significantly

2) The advantage needed to nurse a win without errors from the opponent has increased at the same time that vast databases of games have reduced the advantage that can be milked as White from the few select openings that top modern players use. In recent World Championships and Semifinals over 95% of games have been drawn.

There is a third more damaging effect. The great appeal of chess is that there is an absolute truth in a position, and it is always just beyond your grasp. ("Chess is a sea in which a gnat may drink and an

> "Correspondence chess is a different game than Over-The-Board chess that happens to use the same rules."

elephant may bathe" – Norman Knight, Chess Pieces 1949). Correspondence play allowed me to further MY search for that truth, but the computer has usurped that quest, and a lot of the enjoyment.

The future of this type of chess may be limited. I feel that there is minimal potential to increase the quality of engine programming, but computing power will continue to increase. It takes a great deal of self-belief to go against a computer recommended move at 12 ply depth, and many do not, but that is the only way to win a game. Good humans still have an edge in the transition from middle game to endgame and in realizing intrinsic weaknesses in a King's defenses that can be exploited. Rarely, there is an opportunity to discover an opening novelty - at move 15-20! Maybe we will begin using chess 960 for starting positions, and such tournaments are becoming more fashionable.

When I achieved my SIM in 2011 I set my next goal to achieving a rating of 2500, but did not feel that a GM norm, let alone a title, was possible. To achieve a title you must receive 3 norms. A norm is the score, mathematically calculated based on the ratings of the opponents that, for example a GM, would achieve if he were having a very good tournament. In this tournament I needed to win 6 games, draw four and lose none against a GM, 4 SIM and 3 IM – in a climate where 90% of games are usually drawn.

If you can imagine a nail-biting Thunder overtime game, except that it takes 15 months instead of 5 minutes to play out, then you might have an inkling of understanding of how it felt to play in this tournament as 6 months into it my games were taking paths where a GM norm became a slim possibility. Now that it is over the games can be looked at individually, but playing the tournament is more like 10 interwoven parallel games evolving and telling a story all at the same time.

Tom did a great job in analyzing three games and picking out the crucial points. I thought it would be a useful exercise to present those games again along with my contemporaneous notes interspersed with some background from what was happening in the tournament at that time. This should give some insight into how I have to approach games, the work required and how crazy we top correspondence players really are! In some instances my comments on a position will differ from Tom's, mainly where he did not have access to my database research. The main difference will be how many moves earlier I had to appreciate the critical positions and how much earlier in the game I had concluded what the result would be. I will add many diagrams to reflect the many critical decisions taken. If there is positive feedback I will present some other games.

In a future article I will describe in more detail what my process is as I prepare for and play in a tournament. My next tournament starts in March – Category 10, 14 games, average rating 2490!

If anyone is interested in getting started in correspondence chess, then please contact me.

Let me finish with a final thanks to Tom. Before he asked me to look at these games I had considered them to be successful outcomes to a lot of hard work. After going over them I realized that I had been selling myself a bit short. There was a quality and a beauty to them that represents what I was trying to achieve when I made the switch to correspondence chess – and why I recommend it to others.

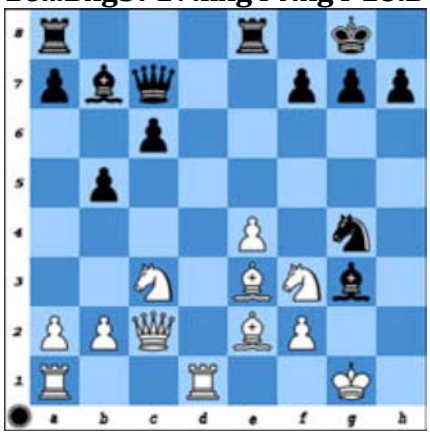
[TB- Read Ciaran's insightful notes to these games and you will see an interesting contrast of viewpoints. And there are places where a move I thought must be a deep defensive idea turns out to be a blunder. Or vice versa!

To compare notes in an online playable format, both sets of annotations of these four games will be in the next posting of the Okie Database. Or you can read them manually in this and the previous two issues.)

On to the games… See "Game of the Month" and additional games starting on page 18…

This month an experiment … we are presenting the same GOTM from last month, but this time with Ciaran's own notes from an "insider's" perspective, explaining how the techniques of using the computer in correspondence play produce subtle effects that lead to incredible games. I will include some of my notes from last month here in blue so that you can see some examples of different points of view on the game. — TB

Caraphina (CPV), Francisco (2349) – O'Hare SIM (USA), Ciaran (2434)
31.03.2016 [D46]
[NOTES BY CIARAN O'HARE]
I had to win at least one game as Black, and this was the opponent I had targeted as most likely due to his previous games. I discovered a true opening novelty in a position played by Grandmasters many times before.
1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 Nf6 4.Nc3 c6 5.e3 Nbd7 6.Qc2 Bd6 7.Bd3 0-0 8.0-0 dxc4 9.Bxc4 b5 10.Be2 Bb7 11.Rd1 Qc7 12.e4 e5 Up to here White had been largely determining the opening moves. Here he chose which path he wanted to follow and after 13.g3 I began my first serious look at the position and opening theory. **13.g3** 13.Bg5 is more common **13...Rfe8 14.dxe5 Nxe5 15.Bg5** Shirov and others have reached this position.
15...Neg4!?
This was my first chance to determine the path. I looked at the most aggressive line first, and it was here that I discovered my improvement. After a quick check of the quieter lines I was confident that there was a decent chance that White would walk into my improvement. The problem with sharp positions is that if both players navigate the tricky moves (usually well known to theory and engines), the tension usually dissipates quickly through exchanges. Most games are won by positional means leading to a significant tactic. [15...b4!? was the main alternative 16.Nxe5! Rxe5 17.Bxf6 gxf6 18.Nb1 Bf8!?N 19.Nd2 Rae8 20.Bf1˜; 15...Nxf3+ 16.Bxf3 Qe7 17.Ne2 Be5 feels better for white because of the Pc6; 15...Rad8?! 16.Nh4]
16.h3
TB had commented here "This seems to be a new move, a provocative attempt to win that my Fritz computer also says is best. But considering how Ciaran crushes it, perhaps it is not wise! GMs in OTB games have here played 16.Bxf6 …"
Ciaran says: White follows known theory, perhaps steering for an early draw. [16.Rac1 Bc5 17.Bxf6 Bxf2+ 18.Kh1 gxf6 19.Nxb5! Qe7 20.Nd6 Ne3 21.Qb3 Nxd1 22.Rxd1= Rad8 23.Nxe8 Rxe8 is an example of exchanges killing the position]
16...Bxg3! 17.hxg4 Nxg4 18.Be3



18...Re6!
TB had commented here, "Very interesting. My computer doesn't like this and instead says black's best is 18...Nxe3 19.fxe3 Re6 which it calls about even, maybe a slight edge for white. Instead, Ciaran takes a different path, not exchanging pieces despite the damage to white's pawns, and keeping long-term pressure that is hard for white to overcome."
—But Ciaran has a very different viewpoint:
Ciaran: 18...Nxe3 was exclusively played by humans before. By destroying the King's protection Black often sets up a perpetual. 19.fxe3 Re6 *(19...b4?≤ 20.Na4 Re6 21.Nc5 Rg6 22.Rd7 Bh4+)* 20.Bd3 Rf6 21.Rf1 Rh6 22.Ne2≤; 18...Bh2+ 19.Kh1 *(19.Kg2!?N* I thought this would be an improvement for White. *19...b4 20.Rh1!)* 19...Re6 20.Ng5N Bg1 21.e5 Rh6+ 22.Kxg1 Nxe3 23.Qd3 Nxd1 24.Rxd1≤; 18...b4?]

So, you can see from Ciaran's comment that not only was his database more extensive than mine, but he had been searching diligently in this line to find improvements for Black. He finds it…
19.Bd4
19.Qd3 Rae8 *(19...Nxe3= 20.Qxe3 Bf4 21.Qd4 Rd6*

22.Qc5 Rh6 23.Rd3 Bd6 24.Rxd6 Qxd6 25.Qxd6 Rxd6 26.e5 Rg6+) 20.Qd7 Qb8 21.Bc5 Nf6!? 22.Qd3 b4 23.Ng5

19...Rh6!! N

This was my novelty. I felt that Black was one piece away from winning against the White King. White was so underdeveloped that he could not use the two tempi I was spending on the Rook lift. [19...Rg6 Seems to have been worked out to a draw! 20.Kf1! c5!? 21.Be3!? (21.Nxb5!? Qf4 22.Bxc5 Bxe4 23.Qd2 Qf6 24.Qd4 Bxf3 25.Qxf6 Nh2+ 26.Kg1 *(26.Ke1?! Rxf6 27.fxg3 Re8 28.Nc3 Bxe2 29.Nxe2 Rfe6 30.Kd2 Rxe2+ 31.Kc3≥* Draw (45) MAKAROV-1978 (2529)-Black Queen (2509) Engine Room 2014*)* 26...Rxf6 27.fxg3 Bxe2ô 28.Rd6 Ng4 29.Rxf6 Nxf6 30.Nxa7 Ne4 31.Be3≥ 0-1 (38) Wrong move(2536)-Black Queen (2546) Engine Room 2014) 21...Nxe3+ 22.fxe3 from here 12 engine games were drawn.; 19...Rae8= 20.Bd3 Bh2+ 21.Kg2 Rh6 22.Ne2! seems a troublesome defensive move. 22...Qc8 23.Kf1 Bd6 24.Rac1

20.b4 [20.Nxb5? Bh2+ 21.Kf1 cxb5]

20...Re8!! This was the hard move to find. The point is that any opening of the e-file leaves White's King unable to run and hide. [20...Nxf2? 21.Bxf2; 20...Qf4? 21.Qd2; 20...a5 21.bxa5 c5 22.Nd5 Bxd5 23.exd5 Bd6 24.Bd3 Nh2 and even here Black has good compensation.]

21.Bxa7 ?! [21.Nxb5? Qf4 22.Nc3 Nxf2!;
I was expecting 21.a4 Bf4! *(21...a5!?; 21...Ree6 22.e5 Bxe5 23.Bxe5 Nxe5 24.Nxe5 Rxe5 25.Bf3≥)* 22.axb5 Qc8! 23.Bf1 Nh2 24.Bg2 Nxf3+ 25.Bxf3 Qh3 26.Bg2 Rg6 27.f3; 21.Rab1?! Ree6 22.e5 Bxe5 23.Bxe5 Nxe5 24.Ne4 f5!]

21...Bf4

The rest of the game was fun to spend analyzing. Engine evaluations just kept getting better for Black. From a correspondence perspective the game was over. I just had to make sure that I didn't allow him a passed a- or b- pawn. **22.Bc5** [22.Qd3 Bc8 23.Bd4 Nh2 24.Nxh2 Bxh2+ 25.Kf1 Rh3 26.Be3 Bf4 27.Ke1 Bxe3 28.fxe3 Qe7 29.Qd4 Qh4+]

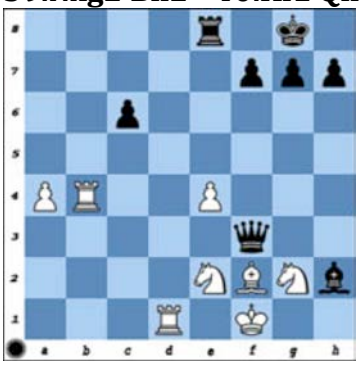
22...Bc8 23.Bd4 Qe7 24.Kf1 Qe6 25.Ke1 Rh1+ 26.Bf1 Black can pick up a few loose pawns before going for the kill. White is paralyzed.

26...Qc4 27.Qe2 Qxb4 28.a4 Nf6 29.Rab1 [29.Bxf6 gxf6 30.Rd3 Bh3 31.Ng1 Rxg1 32.Rxh3 f5! [always a threat with the Re8] 33.Rb1 Qa5 34.Qd3 bxa4 35.Ke2 fxe4 36.Nxe4 Qf5 37.f3 Rxf1 38.Rxf1 Qxh3] **29...Qa5**

The Queen's journey from e7 to the q-side and back to g5 and h4 is pretty.

30.Nd2 [30.Bxf6 gxf6 31.Rd3 b4 32.Nd1 Ba6]

30...b4 31.Nc4 Qg5 32.Rxb4 Bh3 33.Ne3 Ng4 34.Qf3 [34.Kd2 Rh2 35.Bxh3 Nxf2 36.Bd7 Nxd1 37.Qxh2 Bxh2 38.Bxe8 Nxe3 39.Bxf7+ Kxf7 40.Bxe3 Qe7 41.Rc4 Be5 42.Nd1 Qa3 43.Rxc6 Qxa4 44.Rc5 Qxe4] **34...Nxf2 35.Kxf2 Rh2+ 36.Bg2 Qh4+ 37.Kg1 Bxg2 38.Qxg2 Rxg2+ 39.Nxg2 Bh2+ 40.Kf1 Qh3 41.Ne2 Qf3+ 42.Bf2**



42... Bg3! One last trick **43.Nxg3 Qxd1+ 44.Ne1 h5 45.Nf5 Qd2 46.Rd4 Qf4 47.Ng3 c5 48.Rd3 h4 49.Rf3 Qe5 50.Nf5 Qh2 51.Nxh4 Qh1+ 52.Ke2 Rxe4+ 53.Re3 Rxa4** [Not 53...Rxh4?? With the K exposed. Black wants to leave pieces on. 54.Bxh4 Qxh4] **54.Nhf3 Ra2+ 55.Nd2 Qb7 56.Rd3 Qb4 57.Nef3 c4 58.Rd8+ Kh7 59.Be3 c3** White resigns. A fun game… for Black! **0-1**

UPCOMING TOURNAMENTS

For More Tournament Info Visit the USCF Tournament Site:
www.uschess.org/tlas/upcoming.php

Feb 11 2017 **4th "Do or Do Not" Quads** **Norman OK**
3-RR Quads; G/60 + 30. OU Student Union. More Info: http://oklahoma.orgsync.com/org/chess/home

Feb 16-20 2017 **Southwest Class Championships** **Fort Worth TX**
9SS (Master Section), 7SS (other sections). $30,000 total prize fund. DFW Airport Marriott South, 4151 Centreport Blvd., Fort Worth, TX. More info: http://www.uschess.org/tlas/upcoming.php?STATE=TX

Mar 1 2017 **Pioneer Chess League Season Begins** **OK**
Pre-season team signups begin January 1. See Article last issue. More info on the OCF website.

Mar 18-19 2017 **Arkansas Open** **Fayetteville AR**
5-SS; G/90 + 30, Mount Sequoyah Retreat Center, 150 N. Skyline Dr., Fayetteville AR. Two Sections: ($$ b/40) Open: $250-150; U1800-$120; Reserve: (U-1600) $150-100; U-1300-$100; Upset-$50; EF: Open $45; Reserve $35 (deduct $5 from either if postmarked by Mar. 13). TD: Les Kline, 801 N. Rush Dr., Fayetteville AR 72701; cl_kline@sbcglobal.net; (479) 595-5720. Reg. 8:15-9:15 AM Sat.; Rds. 9:30-2-6:30; Sun. 9-1:15. ACA/OSA; USCF required. Lodging: Cabin rooms $80 (no tax) at Mt. Sequoyah Retreat Center; 800-760-8126 (toll free), M-F 9am-5pm.

Mar 25 2017 **5th "Do or Do Not" Quads** **Norman OK**
3-RR Quads; G/60 + 30. OU Student Union. More Info: http://oklahoma.orgsync.com/org/chess/home

Apr 22 2017 **6th "Do or Do Not" Quads** **Norman OK**
3-RR Quads; G/60 + 30. OU Student Union. More Info: http://oklahoma.orgsync.com/org/chess/home

Apr 29 2017 **15th Annual Red River Shootout** **Davis OK**
This is the REAL Red River Shootout, the annual team match between the most fanatical chess players in Oklahoma and Texas. 2 games with same opponent. More details at http://rrsochess.net/rrso_home.html#RRSO including the history of the event, team captains, and more.

May 27-28 2017 Frank K Berry Memorial Tulsa OK
5-SS; G/90+30; Trade Winds Central Hotel, 3141 E. Skelly Dr (NW corner of 51st and Harvard), Tulsa OK 74105 (918-749-5561). Free WiFi, www.tradewindstulsa.com Hotel Rates: $55-$69. Two Sections: Open, and Reserve (U1700). EF: $40 if mailed by 5/21, $50 thereafter, FREE entry for Masters 2200+ (deducted from prizewinnings). Free OCF Memb. Prizes $$2400 (1st prize Gtd., the rest b/65). Open: $600(G)-250 U2100: 200-100, U1900: 200-100, Reserve (U1700): $300-200, U1400: 200-100, U1100/UNR: 150. More $$ if entries permit. Byes: One half-point bye Rds 1-5 if commit before Sat 9PM. REG: 9-9:45 Sat AM Rounds: 10-2:30-7, 9-1:15. Possible bughouse tournament. Entries to: Tom Braunlich, 7500 S. Birch, Broken Arrow OK 74011. Inquiries: tom.braunlich@cox.net Web: www.ocfchess.org

Ciaran O'Hare's Comparing Notes ...

LeBled IM (FRA),Pierre (2414) –
O'Hare SIM Game (USA),Ciaran (2434) [B94]
FOR OCM, 31.03.2015 *[O'Hare]*

M. Pierre Le Page is a French IM who only rarely does not draw games. Looking over his previous games he takes few chances and follows mainline openings. I had felt that I should just draw this game and move on.

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bg5 Nbd7 7.Bc4 Qb6 8.Bb3 e6 9.Qd2 Be7 10.0-0-0 Nc5 11.f3 Qc7 [11...0ñ0 is a tempo loss that Black cannot afford 12.h4! Better than the standard Kb1 12...Qc7 13.h5!] **12.g4!? b5! 13.h4 Bd7 14.Kb1 0-0!?**

[14...Rb8? 15.Nf5! I do not need to allow this! 15...exf5 16.Bxf6 Bxf6 17.Nd5 Qd8 18.exf5 0-0 19.g5 Be5 20.f4 and White wins;

14...b4! After the game I thought this may be the only move that saves the variation for Black, by driving away a possible attacker and leaving the King in the center - very scary! 15.Nce2 a5˜] **15.a3!** [15.Bxf6 Bxf6 16.g5 Be7 17.h5 Rab8 Even though this looks dangerous it is a well studied theoretical position that leads to a draw. 18.g6 Bf6!]

It was here that I confirmed my suspicion that he was following a previous game of his where he was playing Black. I went looking for where he thought he had found an improvement for White. It was playing 19. cxb3 (see below) which saves a tempo for the attack by not bringing the N back to capture. However I worked out that this weakening of the White King's protection allowed Black enough counterplay. All was well and I could continue following his game.

15...Rfb8 16.Bxf6 Bxf6 17.g5 Be7 18.h5 Nxb3 [18...a5 (too soon) 19.Nf5!? Bf8 *(19...exf5? 20.Bxf7+! Kxf7 21.g6+ Kg8 22.Nd5)* 20.g6 Nxb3 21.cxb3 h6 22.gxf7+ Kxf7 23.Nxd6+] **19.cxb3**

He plays his new move, as expected.

[19.Nxb3 was what his previous opponent had played and I had worked out replies to any other places White might try and improve.]

19...Be8??

I was on a break and so did not respond to his move for two weeks. Upon return I made the unforgivable error of not referring to my written notes and thoughts, but had set up an analysis board incorrectly. As I pressed the send button my third eye saw that I was responding to 19. Nxb3 and not 19. cxb3. [Correct was 19...a5 (only move) 20.Nf5!? *(20.g6 b4)* 20...Bf8! *(20...exf5? 21.h6!)*

> "As I pressed the send button my third eye saw that I was responding to 19. Nxb3 and not 19. cxb3!"

21.g6 Bc6 *(21...Be8?? 22.gxh7+ Kh8 23.Nd5!!)* 22.Nxd6 Bxd6 23.Qxd6 Qxd6 24.Rxd6 Be8 White is better but Black should hold. On the other hand if this is the best that Black can do then 14....0-0 is a mistake and Black should play 14.... b4]

20.Nf5!

-- BLACK IS TOTALLY LOST! --

I fell into a deep misery as by this time the other games were progressing favorably, and a loss would have put the kibosh on the whole tournament. I set the game aside for 10 days, and then spent many hours trying to find any possible escape. I came up with the 6th rank defense and found one path that might get me there if he went onto autopilot assuming the game was won. Predicting the next 15 moves was straightforward as they were best play moves.

20...exf5 21.h6 f6 [21...g6 22.Nd5 Qd7 *(22...Qa7? 23.Qc3 f6 24.gxf6 Bf8 25.Ne7+)* 23.Qc3 f6 24.gxf6 Bd8 25.Ne7+ Kf8 26.exf5] **22.Nd5 Qd7** [22...Qd8? 23.g6! Bxg6 24.Nf4! and mate along the h-file 24...Bf7 *(24...d5 25.Nxg6 hxg6 26.hxg7)* 25.hxg7] **23.hxg7 fxg5 24.Rxh7 Kxh7 25.Rh1+ Bh5 26.Rxh5+ Kxg7**

27.Nxe7 Qxe7 28.Rxg5+ Kf8 [28...Kf7 29.Qd5+ Qe6 30.Rg7+ Kxg7 31.Qxe6 fxe4] **29.Rxf5+** [29.Qf4 Qxg5 30.Qxg5 fxe4 31.Qf6+ Kg8 32.Qg6+ Kh8 33.Qxe4] **29...Ke8 30.Qd5 Rc8 31.e5**
I sent the next moves as conditional moves (the server doesn't show them until he plays his move) I was hoping he would not sense that there was a swindle being planned) **31...Ra7 32.exd6 Qg7 33.Rg5** [33.Qe6+ Kd8 34.f4 Rc6 35.Rg5 Qh7+ 36.Ka2 Rf7 37.Re5 Qg8 38.Qd5 Kd7 39.f5 Rg7 40.Re7+ Rxe7 41.Qxg8 Rxd6 is similar to the game] **33...Qh7+ 34.Ka2 Kd8** [34...Kd7? 35.Re5 Kd8 36.Qe6 Qf7 37.Qh6 Kd7 38.Re7+ Qxe7 39.dxe7 Raa8]

35.Rg8+? White pays the price for not checking everything! He should have transposed to a winning Rook ending - but while Stockfish will eventually find it, Komodo sticks with winning my Queen [Correct was 35.Qg8+! he misses his chance 35...Qxg8 36.Rxg8+ Kd7 37.Rg7+ Kxd6 38.Rxa7 Rc6 39.a4 Kc5 40.Rf7 Rd6 41.Rf5+ Kb6 42.Ka3 Rd3 43.axb5 axb5 44.Kb4 Rd4+ 45.Kc3] **35...Kd7 36.Rg1 Rc6 37.Qe5 Ra8 38.Rg7+ Qxg7 39.Qxg7+ Kxd6 40.f4 Rac8!** I must stop the P getting to f6 [40...Rd8 Would not allow a 3rd rank fortress! 41.f5 Rd7 42.Qf8+ Ke5 43.Qe8+ Kd6 44.f6 Rcc7 45.a4 Rf7 46.a5 Rb7 47.b4+ñ [#]] **41.a4** [41.f5 R8c7 42.Qg5 *(42.Qh8 Ke7!; 42.Qd4+ Ke7 43.a4 bxa4 44.bxa4 Kf7 45.Ka3 Rf6 46.Qd5+ Kg7 47.b4 Rcc6)* 42...Kd7 43.f6 Ke6; 41.b4 Ke6! 42.Qe5+ Kf7 43.Kb3] **41...bxa4 42.bxa4 Ke6 43.b4** [43.Qh6+ Ke7 44.Qg5+ Kf7 *(44...Rf6?? 45.Qg7+)*] **43...Rd8 44.Qg6+** [44.b5 axb5 45.axb5 Rcd6 46.Qe5+ Kf7 47.f5 R8d7 48.Ka3 Rb6 49.Ka4 Rdb7] **44...Kd7 45.Qf7+ Kc8** Now my fortress cannot be stopped or broken **46.Qf5+ Kc7 47.Kb3 Rdd6** This is drawn - park a rook on h6 and the other floats between b6 and f6 - or park one on d6 and the other moves from h6 to f6 **48.b5 axb5 49.axb5 Rb6 50.Kb4 Rh6** Draw offered and accepted. Strange game - When I knew I was following one of his I got lazy and didn't determine that I should not castle into the attack (14...0-0?!) . I then made it worse by not following my own analysis only to survive by finding the one saving resource. **DRAW**

O'Hare SIM (USA), Ciaran (2434) – Har-Even GM (ISR), Abir (2408)
For OCM, 31.03.2015 [A81] *[O'Hare]*
Abir Har-Even is a long time Israeli GM. He has a penchant for the Dutch, which I feel is a risky opening, so I encouraged him play it! **1.d4 f5 2.g3 Nf6 3.Nf3 g6 4.Bg2 Bg7 5.0-0 0-0 6.b4!?** If Black doesn't react then White will grab space on the Q-side and have an endgame advantage. It does leave c3 weak. **6...Nc6!? 7.c3** [7.a3 d5 8.Bb2 Ne4 Anand-Nakamura 2010 Draw] **7...Ne4 8.a4 d5 9.Bf4 e6 10.Qc1 Qe7**
It was time to take stock of a complicated position. It is dynamically equal. White can stop Black breaking with e5, but has to watch for a K-side pawn push. White will eventually swap the e4 N and hope to create something on the Q-side. **11.Rd1** aimed against e5 by Black **11...b6?!** This computer move cannot be correct. **12.a5 Ba6?** I just considered this an error, if not close to a lost position. [12...bxa5 13.b5!; 12...Bb7 13.a6!; 12...a6 13.Ne5 Bb7 14.h4!?] **13.axb6! axb6** [13...Bxe2!? may have been the original intention but... 14.bxc7! Bxd1 15.Qxd1 g5 16.Nxg5! Nxg5 17.Ra6!! [#] 17...Nxb4 *(17...Ne5 18.Bxg5 Qxg5 19.dxe5)* 18.cxb4 Rfc8 19.Nc3] **14.Rxa6 Rxa6** [14...Nxd4 15.Nxd4 Rxa6 16.Nc6 Qd7 17.Bxe4 fxe4 18.c4!] **15.b5 Ra2 16.bxc6 Rxe2**

17.c4!! A move not considered by the engine

which favored defending by Rf1 [17.Rf1 Ra2 18.h4 Rfa8 and Black has compensation] **17...Qb4**
[17...Rxf2? 18.Nc3!;
17...dxc4 18.Qxc4 Rxf2 19.Nbd2 the rook is trapped]
18.Qa3! White forces Black to simplify down to an ending that can appear equal, but should be a technical win for White **18...Qb2 19.Qxb2 Rxb2 20.Nbd2** White has to activate his bishops while keeping enough pawns on the board to win **20...h6** [20...Rc2 21.Bf1 h6 22.h4 Nc3 23.Bd3 Rb2 24.Re1 Ne4 25.Re2 Rb4] **21.h4** so that g5 would allow White to swap and open the h file for a later rook incursion [21.Bxc7? activates Black's rook 21...Rc8 22.Bf4 Nc3 23.Re1 g5 24.Be3 Rxc6 25.Ne5 Bxe5 26.dxe5] **21...b5 22.cxb5 Rxb5 23.Bh3** I worked out that by hanging onto Pc6 I delayed Black activating his rooks [23.Nxe4?! fxe4 24.Ne5 g5 25.hxg5 hxg5 26.Bxg5 Bxe5 27.dxe5 and Black might hold; 23.Bxc7?! Rc8 24.Bf4 Rxc6] **23...Rb6 24.Rc1 Nxd2 25.Nxd2 Bxd4** [25...Rc8 Neither does being passive save Black 26.Nf3 Kf7 27.Bf1 Ke7 28.Ra1 Rxc6 29.Ra7 Rc3 30.Kg2 Rc2 31.Bd3 Rc3 32.Ba6 Ra3 33.Bd2 Ra2 34.Bb4+ Kd8 35.Bxc8 Rxa7 36.Bxe6 c6 37.Bc5 Rb7 38.Ne5 Bxe5 39.dxe5 h5 40.Kf3] **26.Nf3** [26.Bxh6? Ra8 27.Nf3 Bb2] **26...Bb2** [26...e5 27.Bxe5 Bxe5 28.Nxe5 Rf6 29.Bg2] **27.Bxc7 Rb3** [27...Bxc1?? 28.Bxb6] **28.Rb1 Rxf3 29.Rxb2 Rc3 30.Bf4** Now that tactics have forced favorable exchanges White forces an exchange of pawns that opens the h-file as an access point for White's rook. [30.Rb6? Rc8 31.Bf4 g5 32.hxg5 hxg5 33.Bxg5 R3xc6 34.Rb7 R8c7] **30...g5 31.hxg5 hxg5 32.Bxg5 Rxc6 33.Bg2!** The B will go to f3, the K to g2 and the Rook to the h-file **33...Kf7 34.Bf3 Kg6 35.Bf4 Rh8 36.Rb1 Kf6 37.Re1 Ra8 38.Kg2** I have now stopped Black advancing his pawns. My plan is to fix the P on e6 and if Black does nothing then infiltrate with my King. I have to keep f2 defended. **38...Ra2 39.Bd1 Ra7** [39...Rca6 40.Be5+ Ke7 41.Rh1 Kd7 42.Rh7+ Kc6 43.Rc7+ Kb6 44.Rc1 Kb7 45.Bh5 Rc6 46.Rb1+ Rb6 47.Rh1 Ra4 48.Be8] **40.Be5+ Ke7 41.Rh1 Ra2 42.Rh7+ Kd8 43.Bh5** Keeps the pressure on - if he follows his computer he will get into trouble **43...Rcc2** [43...Rd2?! 44.g4! fxg4 45.Bxg4 Kc8 46.Re7 Rcc2 47.Bxe6+ Kd8 48.Rf7; 43...Raa6 44.Bf6+ Kc8 45.Re7 Rc7 46.Re8+ Kb7 47.Be5 Rh7 48.Be2 Rc6 49.Bd4 Rh6 50.Kf3] **44.Bd4** The game is pretty much over. White can improve his pieces, and has the ability to lose or gain tempi. I will gradually come to control many more squares. **44...Kc8 45.Re7 Rc4 46.Bb6 Rc6 47.Be3 Kd8 48.Rh7 Kc8** [48...e5 49.Bg5+ Kc8 50.Rf7] **49.Rh8+ Kc7 50.Bf4+ Kb6 51.Rb8+ Kc5 52.Be8 Rca6** [52...e5 53.Bxe5 Re6 54.Bc7 f4 55.Bxf4 Ree2 56.Kh3 Rxf2 57.Be3+ Kd6 58.Bxf2 Rxf2 59.Bg6] **53.Bd7 Kd4?!** [53...Ra1 54.Bc8 Ra8 55.Rxa8 Rxa8 56.Bxe6 Rf8 57.Bc1 Rf6 58.Bc8 Kd6 59.Bb2 Rf7 60.Kf3 f4 61.g4] **54.Re8** a series of forced moves secure the win. **54...Re2 55.Bb5 Rea2 56.Bxa6 Rxa6 57.Re7 Rc6 58.Rc7 Ra6 59.Ra7 Rc6 60.Ra1 Ke4 61.Re1+ Kd3 62.Rd1+ Ke2 63.Rd2+ Ke1 64.Kf3 Rc3+ 65.Be3 Rb3 66.Rc2 Rb1 67.Rc1+ Rxc1 68.Bxc1 e5 69.Bg5 d4 70.Bf6 e4+ 71.Kf4 d3 72.Bd4**
1-0 After Black's 'sacrifice' White's pieces were poorly coordinated and Black had the potential to have a strong and mobile center. I had to force suitable exchanges, and then while restraining any Black counterplay I had to slowly infiltrate Black's position while keeping enough pawns on the board to eventually create a winning passed pawn.

O'Hare SIM (USA), Ciaran (2434) –
Miettinen SIM (USA), Kristo (2423)
31.03.2015 [A64] *[O'Hare]*
I have played Kristo several times before. My impression was that he relied heavily on his engine analysis. I was hoping for a position where the engine may lead him astray. He also seeks to complicate - which creates winning chances for both of us. The last time we played I had the worst of the game as Black.
1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 For no real good reason this was my opening choice in this tourney. **3...c5** This unbalances more **4.d5 d6** [4...exd5 5.cxd5 d6 transposes] **5.Nc3 exd5 6.cxd5 g6 7.Bg2 Bg7 8.Nf3 0-0 9.0-0** Back to a well known position **9...Re8 10.Nd2 a6 11.a4 Nbd7** White's next move is critical **12.h3** a "rule" in the English is "if you are stuck for a move then play h3!" I also had an idea where the game was going - and I had researched a new move

for White that altered what had been favorable statistics for Black - one way to catch a computer player! **12...Rb8** [12...Nh5!? 13.Nce4!? Ndf6 14.Nxf6+ Nxf6 15.Nc4 Ne4=] **13.Nc4 Ne5** [13...Nb6 14.Na3 Bd7 15.e4 Qc7 16.Be3] **14.Na3 Nh5** This had been scoring well for Black **15.e4 Bd7 16.a5**

16... Qxa5?! I had been leading him toward this sacrificial variation, which is computer-recommended but I felt was flawed. [Better is 16...b5 17.axb6 Bb5 18.Naxb5 axb5 19.Nxb5 Qxb6 20.Na3 Qb3 *(20...c4 21.Kh2 Qc7˜)* 21.Rb1 Qxd1 22.Rxd1 Rb3=] **17.g4 Nf6 18.f4! Nexg4 19.hxg4 Nxg4 20.f5! h5** [20...Ne5 was the trap move that has been almost refuted. 21.Bg5 *(21.f6 Bh8 22.Bg5 Qd8!?)* 21...Qc7 22.Nc2 b5] **21.Bg5! b5** [21...c4!?˜ 22.Kh1] **22.Nc4!** [22.Qd2 Qb6 23.f6 Bh8 24.Nd1 c4+ 25.Kh1 a5 26.Ne3 Ne5 27.Bh4 a4] **22...Qb4**

This is a mistake, but Black thinks he has an improvement, that I had anticipated and knew was poor. [22...Qc7 23.f6 Bh8 24.Ne3 Ne5 25.Ne2 *(25.Nf5 gxf5 26.Qxh5 b4 27.Rf4 Ng6 28.Rh4 Nxh4 29.Bxh4=)* 25...b4 26.Nf4 c4 27.Nxh5 c3 28.bxc3 bxc3 29.Nf4 Qc5 30.Qe1 Rb3 31.Qf2 Rb2 32.Qg3=] **23.Nxd6**

23... Bd4+? N This is what I hoped Black would play. It looks like an improvement but is a serious mistake. It is wrong to get the Bishop outside of the pawns in front of the black king. It should be on f8. Black is in essence lost here. [Better: 23...Qxb2 24.f6 Bf8 25.Nxe8 Qxc3 26.Nc7 Bd6 27.Rf3 Bh2+ 28.Kh1 Qe5 29.Ne6 =]

24.Kh1 Qxb2 25.Ra2! Qxc3 26.Rf3 Be3?

This was the move Black thought would give him an advantage. [26...Ne3 27.Qe2 b4 28.fxg6 fxg6 29.Nxe8 Qc1+ 30.Bf1 Bg4] **27.fxg6** This seems the most forcing way to reduce Black's options and get the next 3 White moves played. **27...fxg6** The engines give approximate equality but Black is lost after the next forced moves, due to his exposed King. [27...f5? 28.Bxe3 Nxe3 29.Rxe3 Qxe3 30.Qxh5 Re7 31.Nf7; 27...f6 28.Bxe3 Nxe3 29.Qg1 Qe5 30.Nxe8 *(30.Qxe3 Qxd6 31.Raf2 Rf8 32.Qh6 Qe7 33.Qxh5 Qg7 34.e5 f5 35.e6)* 30...Ng4 31.Nxf6+ Nxf6 32.Rxa6 Ng4] **28.Bxe3 Nxe3 29.Qg1 Qe5 30.Qxe3** [30.Rxa6? Ng4 31.Nxe8 Rxe8 32.Rxg6+ Kh7 33.Ra6 Kg8 34.Raa3 c4] **30...Qxd6 31.Raf2 Qe5** [31...Re7 32.Rf6+ñ Qe5 33.Rxg6+ Rg7ô 34.Rff6 Qa1+ 35.Bf1 Rxg6 36.Rxg6+ Kf7 37.Rg1 Qe5] **32.Rf6 Re7ô 33.Rxg6+ Rg7 34.Rff6** Now a series of "only moves"... **34...Qa1+ 35.Bf1 Rxg6ô 36.Rxg6+ Kf7 37.Rg1 Qe5 38.Rg5 Qd4 39.Qf3+**

Diagram

39...Ke7 40.Qg3 Qf6 41.Be2 Rf8 42.e5 Qf4 43.Rg7+ Kd8ô 44.e6 Qxg3 [44...Bxe6 45. dxe6 Qxg3 46.e7+] **45.e7+ Kc7 46. exf8Q Qe1+ 47.Bf1 Qe4+ 48.Kg1 Qd4+ 49.Kg2 Qxd5+** [49...h4 50.Qf7 h3+ 51.Kh2 Qe5+ 52.Rg3] **50.Qf3 Qe5 51.Qg3 Qxg3+ 52.Kxg3 Kd6 53.Rg6+ Kd5 54.Rxa6 c4 55.Kf4 Kc5 56.Ra7 Be6 57.Ke3**

With no pawns left White has to win Black's pawns without letting any get too far advanced. [57.Rh7?? Kd4 58.Re7 Bd5 59.Re1 Bf7 60.Re4+ Kc3 61.Re7 Bg6 62.Ke3 Bf5 63.Re5] **57...Kb4 58.Kd4 h4 59.Re7 Bg4 60.Re4 Bd1** [60...c3 61.Rxg4 c2 62.Kd3+ Kb3] **61.Rxh4 Bc2 62.Rh8 Bf5 63.Bh3 Bb1 64.Bd7 c3 65.Rc8 c2 66.Rc3** Black Resigns [66.Rc3 Ka5 67.Kc5 b4 68.Rc4]

1-0

…Continued from page 4

Spassky–Korchnoi USSR Ch.1955. White is winning in any case, but teenager Spassky played the novel 41.Qh2! 1-0

Larsen–Spassky, USSR vs. Rest of the World. Leningrad 1970.

Black has already sacrificed a Knight on g4. How does he continue the attack? 14…Rh1!! And the game finished 15.Rxh1 g2 16.Rf1 (16.Rg1 Qh4+ 17.Kd1 Qh1! -+) 16…Qh4+ 17.Kd1 gxf1=Q+ 0-1. After 18.Bxf1 Bxg4+ Be2 (18…Kc1 Qe1+) 18…Qh1#.

Andruet–Spassky, Bundesliga, 1988

Here Spassky played the shocking 28…Qf3!! 0-1. After the forced 29.gxf3 Nexf3+ 30.Kh1 comes the quiet move, 30…Bh3! and white's pieces can only lookon helplessly as …Bg2 mate cannot be stopped.

Spassky scored 44 wins, 12 draws and one loss over two nights in Dallas. I believe he quickly recognized the stronger players and was happy to offer them draws. Who wouldn't take a draw against a World Champion?

His one loss came on the second night against Dallas expert Robert Weinberg. Boris told me that this was his only loss on the entire American tour to that point, and he by then had been to both coasts and Chicago.

A lighthearted moment came in the middle of the evening when Spassky arrived at the board of a local Class B player. Norm, (not his real name) slammed a piece down on the board and cried "CHECKMATE!" We were all startled and I dashed over to the board just in time to hear Boris politely explaining to Norm that he couldn't give checkmate while his own King was still in check!

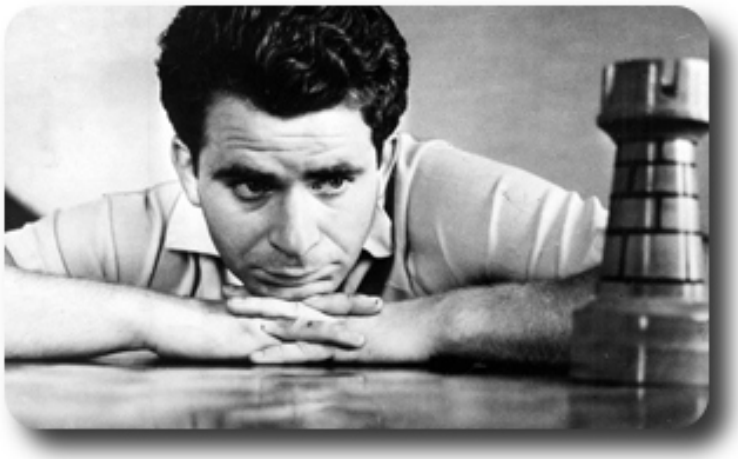
After the exhibition I drove Spassky home and got ready to pay him, but I had a brain freeze. In all the excitement of the evening, I could not for the life of me remember where I had put the $2,500. I was convinced I had dropped it in the parking lot of the hotel. In a state of panic looked all over the house, called the Marriott to see if it had been turned in and prepared to head back to the hotel to search.

Spassky, unbelievably, remained cool, saying, "Lou, don't worry. If the money doesn't show up, it's all right. I've had a wonderful stay in Dallas. If you find the money, you can send it to me." A short time later I got into my car to drive back to the hotel, and abruptly remembered I'd stashed it in the "secret compartment" in the car. The following night, the receipts never left my pocket.

I didn't play any chess against Boris, but he was willing to play all comers on the afternoon of the reception at my house. He gave 5 to 3 minute time odds, but never was in time trouble and didn't come close to losing or drawing a game. He played chess in the same calm and unruffled way he did everything else. Spassky never moved erratically, never slammed a piece down on the board, and never changed his facial expression. But he never took more than a few seconds to make a move.

Boris Spassky played skittles games against FM John Jacobs while casually sipping wine. Jacobs, an up and coming junior when Spassky beat Petrosian for the world championship in 1969, told me later, "I couldn't think of any moves, the only thing I could think about was, "I'm playing Spassky."

On his final night in Dallas, Boris and I sat quietly in my living room and listened to a recording of Beethoven's "Appassionata" piano sonata. He was more than a World Champion.



Spassky was a man of the world, a renaissance man, savoring life one day at a time.

In a 2014 interview, Spassky, then 77 years old, commented, "In general, what a chess player needs has always been the same, with a love of chess the main requirement. Moreover, it has to be loved naturally, with passion, the way people love art, drawing and music. That passion possesses you and seeps into you. I still look at chess with the eyes of a child."

Six years after his visit to Dallas, Spassky played another match against his friend, Bobby Fischer. Boris lost the match (10-5), but still pocketed $1.65 million.

A few weeks following Spassky's Dallas visit, several of us who entertained him received thank you notes from Paris, where Boris lived at the time. Everybody loved this gracious gentleman – the chess players, the women, even the waiters in restaurants.

Thirty years later I warmly remember Spassky's visit as though it happened yesterday.

Spassky vs Fischer in 1970.

Spassky's brilliant King's Gambit attacking win over Bronstein was later immortalized in the 1963 James Bond movie "From Russia With Love" whose villain was a devious grandmaster named Kronsteen. To show his Machiavellian brilliance they portrayed him winning the last few moves of this Spassky game against a fictional Canadian grandmaster. See the video clip of this here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdCo8UVxeXU

Spassky — Bronstein, Leningrad, 1960

1. e4 e5 2. f4 ef4 3. Nf3 d5 4. ed5 Bd6 5. Nc3 Ne7 6. d4 O-O 7. Bd3 Nd7 8. O-O h6 9. Ne4 Nd5 10. c4 Ne3 11. Be3 fe3 12. c5 Be7 13. Bc2 Re8 14. Qd3 e2 15. Nd6 Nf8 16. Nf7 ef1Q 17. Rf1 Bf5 18. Qf5 Qd7 19. Qf4 Bf6 20. N3e5 Qe7 21. Bb3 Be5 22. Ne5+ Kh7 23. Qe4+ 1-0

...Continued from page 8

disadvantage. Black should play 24 … Be3+ followed by ...Bd4, placing the bishop on a strong post. But there's no immediate tactical follow-up, which may have discouraged him since that seems to be what he has been waiting for.

25.Bd2 (?)

White "double clutches" on a throw deep into the red zone! While allowing 25. Rb6 Be3+ 26. Kh1 Nh5 might look a little scary, Black doesn't have enough firepower on the kingside to follow up there effectively. Instead, White gives Black a chance to at least trade off pieces and make the defense of a5 more difficult to defend.

25...g5??

A blunder. Black blocks in his own bishop and creates more weaknesses on the kingside. The idea of a kingside buildup is shut down by White's reply. After a long set of moves that seemed to be "waiting for a blunder," Black instead commits one himself! This result is typical of this type of play — when the blunder doesn't come, the player starts to gets anxious, tries to force the blunder, and ends up making one himself as a result.

26.g4!

This move locks up the kingside, meaning the only active play to be found is on the b-file, where White is in full control.

26...Kg7 27.Na4 Nd7 28.Rb3 Rb8 29.Rab1 Bb7 30.R1b2 Ba8 31.Qb1

It's always fun to see the Alekhine's gun! Note how harmoniously coordinated White's pieces have become due to his following the plan of opening and controlling the b-file.

31...Rxb3 32.Rxb3 Rb8 33.Nb6! Nxb6

Giving up, but the infiltration on the b-file means that with meaningful play — which White has already shown in getting here — the first player is in control. There's not even a good desperation option to recommend here now that the kingside is blocked up. The b-file has fallen, and with it, the game.

34.Rxb6 Rxb6 35.Qxb6 Qxb6 36.axb6 Bb7 37.Bd1!

If Black thought there was a way to blockade the b-pawn in the endgame, he was mistaken. The b-pawn is running toward the end zone, and the bishop is swinging around to give a lead block to the last defender on b7.

37...Kf6 38.Ba4 e6 39.Bc6 Bc8 40.dxe6 Kxe6 41.b7 Bxb7 42.Bxb7, Kf6 43.Bxa6 Bf8 44.Ba5 Be7 45.Kf2 h6 46.Ke3 Kg6 47.Kd3 h5 48.Kc3 hxg4 49.hxg4 Kf7 50.Bc8 Ke8 51.Bf5 Bd8 52.Bxd8 Kxd8 53.Kb3 Kc7 54.Ka4 Kb7 55.Kb5 Kc7 56.Ka6 Kc6 57.Bc8 Kc7 58.Bb7 Kd8 59.Kb6 Kd7 60.Bd5 Kd8 61.Kc6 Ke7 62.Kc7 Kf6 63.Kxd6 Kg6 64.Kxe5 1-0.

Instead of the bad habit of making natural moves while waiting for the blunder, the way to challenge stronger players and thus raise your rating is to learn how to aggressively execute the plan that is in accordance with position — *while still keeping alert for tactics*. Naturally, this is difficult. But making some sort of attempt at positive, purposeful action is always preferable. Find a plan, improve your pieces when possible, and play with purpose every move.

Here is an example of purposeful play from my own practice that gave me much satisfaction. It also illustrates the more modern approach to chess required to defeat strong players of Class A and above. Early in the game when I start to get the initiative, I have to be willing to give something up to repel my opponent's aggressive play and achieve my plan. An offered material sacrifice is the vehicle in this game, but another common example in modern practice is allowing pawn weaknesses in exchange for activity.

After breaking up White's center, I continued to pursue a purposeful development that left me with a strong initiative that I managed to convert into a point against a tough player.

Chuck Johnson (1934)-
John Cope (1987)
2nd Chess-Saturday Invitational (11.2.2013)

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 d5 4. Nf3 Bg7 5. Qb3 dxc4 6. Qxc4 0-0 7. e4 Nc6 8. Be2 Bg4 9. Be3 Bxf3 10. gxf3 e5 11. d5 Nd4

This is a book line, but also a pawn sac, and one Black really needs to offer here to get a strong position. A move like 11 … Ne7 doesn't fit nearly as well with Black's plan of attacking the center, and gives White a move or two to reinforce his center before Black can attack it.

To go back to the football analogy: As the quarterback, I was efficient in taking the short-yardage passes that the defense allowed to move the ball down the field until the pressure finally caused the defense to buckle.

12. Nb5 c6 13. dxc6 Nxc6 14. Bc5?!

Chuck declines the pawn sac and instead aggressively tries to tie up my pieces. But like before, the drawbacks of this move are only exploitable if I'm willing to give up something myself, at least temporarily. Pushing for a win, White has been ignoring development. It's a cue he is overextended. Thus my plan is to push them back and emerge with the initiative. As such, my plan over the next few moves relies on the specific position of my opponent's pieces to allow me to create momentum that can be used to regroup my pieces to strong posts.

14 … a6!

The only route to an advantage. 14 … Re8 is clunky and allows Chuck to continue development with gain of time. I am not actually offering a sacrifice here due to tactical resources, but I don't have forever here — my moves need to carry direct threats at this point to ensure White won't have time to carry out his own plans. Only in this way can I prevent Chuck getting control of d6 and the d-file in general, which would hamper my pieces.

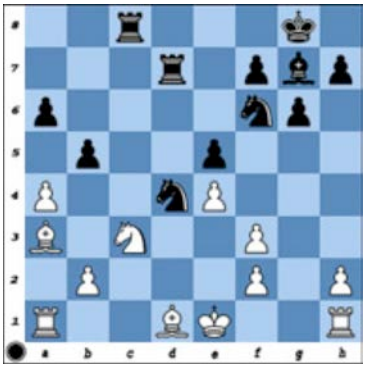
15. Nc3 b5! 16. Qd3 Qxd3 17. Bxd3 Rfd8

My manipulation of the position's tactics allows me time to vacate a better square for the rook. Black has a clear plan of continuing to pressure White's position, thanks to the somewhat clunky placement of the White pieces and Black's lead in development, but this requires me to keep my eye on the ball. Black's main advantage here is time, and shillyshallying would only allow White to catch up in development and be okay. As such, playing with threats will be a major theme over the next few moves. My primary goal is to exploit his awkwardly placed bishop on c5, which doesn't have a good home. I want to control it and increase pressure on it.

18. Be2 Nd4 19. Bd1 Rd7!?

It's worth a reminder here that sometimes there's a tricky balance between preventing your opponent's ideas and making the moves most likely to complete your own plans. If Chuck can plant a knight on d5, it will be a strong piece, disrupting the optimal placement of my pieces and blocking my pressure down the d-file. So I make sure Chuck can't maneuver Bc5-e7xf6 in order to trade off the f6 knight defending d5. Several of my follow-up moves also take into account the importance of defending the d5 square.

20. a4!? Rc8 21. Ba3



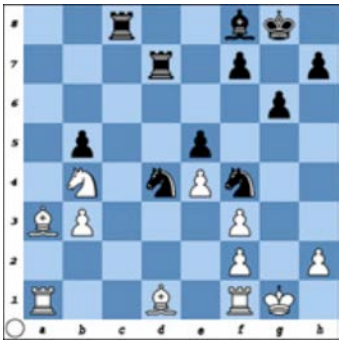
21…Rc4!

Still targeting that Bishop: the threat is ...b4.
22. axb5 axb5 23. Na2

The bishop is saved, but at the expense of awkward placement. Black must now find a plan to increase the advantage.
23. …Nh5

Since White's knight no longer threatens to jump to d5 immediately, I can take a move to improve my own pieces. The timing of this has to be precise — in this case, after White's knight has abandoned the center — because my plan is so reliant on keeping White bottled up through tactical threats. All it takes is one oversight to lose most of my advantage.
24. b3 Rc8 25. Nb4 Nf4!

Again, my plan in this game requires tactical precision. Now that Chuck's knight has returned towards the center, my own knight secures d5 again, but from a more active and threatening post than before.
26. 0-0 Bf8!



27. Na6

White was already in trouble on the a-file, and this allows a deadly pin. This is really the main concrete tactical mistake in the game, coming only after intense pressure. This is to be expected from resolute defense, especially from a player of Chuck's caliber. Waiting for him to make a tactical mistake without this kind of pressure would likely be a long, long wait. It's also a fitting end to what was an extremely tactical plan. The transfer of my bishop to f8 was the final step in putting all my pieces on active posts from which they now harass White's awkward queenside placement. The constant threats finally prove too much:
27 … Bxa3 28. Rxa3 Ra7! 0-1

Even here I can't expect the game to win itself. 28 … Ra8? might initially appear virtually identical to 28…Ra7, but if 28… Ra8 Chuck could muddy the waters with 29. Nc5, getting out of the pin with a counterattack on d7. Strong players can often use such a resource to turn a game around, so tactical vigilance is always needed until the end. If a quarterback making a bad throw is frustrating, throwing an interception in the endzone after a long and successful drive is infuriating!

I hope the games and discussion above have shed light on how planless, "waiting for a blunder" play is a bad habit that the intermediate player must overcome in order to improve and get more satisfaction from chess. Watch for this pitfall in your own games, and try to play with a plan. Following an effective plan puts pressure on your opponent and might even prompt a mistake you can exploit. But even if your opponent doesn't make a mistake, achieving a plan can net you the advantage anyway — just like Aaron Rodgers can often complete a pass even against tight double coverage.

I hope you'll find the narrow throwing lane and zip the football into it properly, at least in most of your games. Until next time, good luck in your chess endeavors!